

An excerpt from *The Deepest Trench* by Chloe Whitehorn

RYAN: Sick huh?

EMMA: Yep.

RYAN: That sucks.

EMMA: Yep.

RYAN: I got you something.

EMMA: Huh. A cactus?

RYAN: Yeah.

EMMA: Does it have magic healing powers?

RYAN: It's for your next job. To keep you company. His name is Jorje.

EMMA: You named my cactus? Jorje. Isn't that Spanish for George?

RYAN: Yeah, like the abominable snowman and Bugs Bunny.

EMMA: Oh yeah. "I will hug him and squeeze him /and call him George."

RYAN: /"And call him George."

EMMA: That's cute. Thanks.

RYAN: You're welcome.

EMMA: Tell me a story.

RYAN: What are you, five?

EMMA: I'm sick. You said you'd do whatever I wanted.

RYAN: Yeah, why did I agree to that again?

EMMA: The February tit grabbing incident.

RYAN: Oh for the last time, I didn't grab your... Alright, acquiescing to the doing what you want thing, only because you're really pathetic when you're sick, I meant like, I don't know, I'd run out to the store to buy you some Kleenex, or let you control the tv remote all day. Something along those lines.

EMMA: Or serve me soup in bed dressed only in an apron?

RYAN: That might be pushing it. Unless, is that something you might--

EMMA: Please no. Regardless, you didn't specify, and I want a story.

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RYAN: You're pretty used to getting whatever you want huh?

EMMA: Pretty much.

RYAN: And people just, like happily do stuff for you?

EMMA: Um, yep.

RYAN: Including me. Even though you basically just mock me for it later.

EMMA: Yep.

RYAN: Like a princess. Would you like a tiara?

EMMA: You happen to have one lying around?

RYAN: Why do you think people respond to you that way?

EMMA: I don't know. It's a pair of ducks.

RYAN: A what?

EMMA: A pair of ducks. Haven't you ever heard that expression before? Pair of ducks. It's like something that seems to contradict itself in like a crazy way, but it's really true.

RYAN: Huh. Is that anything like a paradox?

EMMA: I don't know. What's that?

RYAN: Fine. Got any books I could read you?

EMMA: Nope. Want one from your head.

RYAN: You're the journalist.

EMMA: Weather girl. I just read what they tell me to. C'mon just try.

RYAN: Once there were some ducks.

*Pause.*

EMMA: Okay, good start. What happens next?

RYAN: Nothing.

EMMA: What do you mean nothing?

RYAN: Nothing. That's it.

EMMA: "Once there were some ducks." That's it? That's not a story.

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RYAN: Oh, yeah, you're right. Okay.

EMMA: Okay.

RYAN: I'll go again.

EMMA: Okay.

RYAN: Once upon a time there were some ducks. The end.

EMMA: Seriously?

RYAN: Hey, it had the once upon a time part and the end. Makes it a story.

EMMA: Okay, then a story your mom used to tell you before bed.

RYAN: You want me to tell you a story my mother used to tell me before bed?

EMMA: Yeah. I'm sure you can remember one.

RYAN: Oh, I can remember but...

EMMA: But nothing. I'm sick.

RYAN: It's embarrassing.

EMMA: Ooh, then I definitely want to hear.

RYAN: It's about mermaids.

EMMA: Wow.

RYAN: Thanks.

EMMA: Suck it up and tell.

RYAN: It was a long time ago. Not sure if I really remember--

EMMA: Quit stalling.

RYAN: *(Sighs. Resigned)* Once upon a time...

EMMA: This isn't going to be like, once upon a time there were some mermaids, the end?  
'Cause I'm warning you now that's not going to cut it.

RYAN: Nope, it's not.

EMMA: Promise?

RYAN: I promise.

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EMMA: Okay.

RYAN: Okay. Once upon a time there was a mermaid princess named Emma.

EMMA: Hey my name is Emma.

RYAN: Don't read too much into that.

EMMA: Okay.

RYAN: Are you going to keep interrupting?

*Emma makes a motion of zipping her lips.*

RYAN: So this mermaid princess—

EMMA: Named Emma.

RYAN: This mermaid princess named Emma had a beautiful palace she'd inherited from her father. It was the most envied palace in all the kingdom.

EMMA: Why?

RYAN: Excuse me?

EMMA: What made it so amazing?

RYAN: Um, it had really low property taxes and uh, the best view of the coral reef. You know, location location location.

EMMA: Cool.

RYAN: One day the evil queen, who lived in a far away suburb that was surrounded by Walmarts and dollar stores, so it really wasn't fantastic, she decided that SHE should get to live in the beautiful palace and she started to gather an army to take it over.

EMMA: An army? In a mermaid kingdom.

RYAN: Yeah. It was mostly made up of spikey blowfish and electric eels.

EMMA: So what did the princess do?

RYAN: Well she heard the evil queen was building this army and she was frightened because she was all alone and she didn't know what to do. So she put a call out to all the bravest warriors for a champion to come forward to protect her.

EMMA: Your mother wasn't a feminist was she?

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RYAN: Uh, yeah, she was.

EMMA: Sure, okay.

RYAN: But none of the warriors came forward. They were all too scared. Except one. Ryan.

EMMA: The warrior was named Ryan? Like you?

RYAN: Shh. He was quieter and geekier and not as pompous as the others and everyone laughed at him and the princess looked worried. But he said, “relax princess, I have a plan. I’m going to build the deepest trench in the ocean and it will protect you from any army the evil queen could ever muster. It will always be there to protect you and keep you safe. And you will never feel sad or alone or scared ever again. I will make sure of it.” The warrior built the trench and the princess fell in love with him and felt safe and protected and she was never scared ever again. And they lived happily ever after.

EMMA: Okay, I have two problems with this.

RYAN: Only two?

EMMA: One, there’s no way you can claim your mother was a feminist if she was telling you stories about princesses being rescued by warrior men. I mean, what kind of message was that sending to you.

RYAN: I’m changing it up for you, okay. It was a girl mermaid who rescues a prince named Ryan. I’m flipping it around for you cause... It was totally representative of how my mom would always keep me safe and... What’s your other problem?

EMMA: “The deepest trench in the ocean”? It’s an ocean. Filled with water. Won’t the fish army just swim past it? I mean, a trench is a way of protecting troops, not keeping people out. Wouldn’t a gigantic wall built out of coral or starfish or something have made more sense?

RYAN: Do you hear yourself right now?

EMMA: I’m just saying.

RYAN: It’s a ocean trench. It’s so deep it changes the water currents and any evil fish that tries to cross it gets sucked down into—you know, you’re the one who wanted a story.

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EMMA: It's like a pair of ducks trench.

RYAN: Sure. Yeah, or a paradoxical trench.

EMMA: We're like a pair of ducks.

RYAN: Yeah. Guess so.

EMMA: I'm sleepy now.

RYAN: Okay. You nap. When you wake up maybe we'll flip through a dictionary and you can look up the definition of "paradox".